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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 MANAGUA 000541

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WHA/CEN, H FOR MARK SMITH

E.O. 12958: DECL: 02/28/2017

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [KDEM](#) [NU](#) [PREL](#)

SUBJECT: CODEL NELSON MEETS WITH FOREIGN MINISTER SANTOS

Classified By: Ambassador Paul A. Trivelli. Reasons 1.4 (B,D).

¶1. (C) Summary: In Senator Nelson's meeting with Nicaraguan Foreign Minister Samuel Santos, he impressed upon Santos his desire to establish sincere and positive relations with the new Ortega government and the Nicaraguan people. The Senator commented that Venezuelan President Chavez' lack of sincerity is troublesome as was the Iranian President's exploitation of his visit to Nicaragua to lash out against the United States.

Santos was favorable towards CAFTA, noting the 30% increase in Nicaraguan exports to the United States since CAFTA implementation, although he noted that the "asymmetries" between the two countries makes it difficult for Nicaragua to compete against the more sophisticated U.S. economy. He also opined that as Nicaragua's economy improves, fewer Nicaraguans will attempt to immigrate illegally to the United States and other countries. End Summary.

¶2. (U) Foreign Minister Santos and his wife Anelli graciously hosted CODEL Nelson for afternoon coffee at their residence and coffee plantation on February 18. Senator Nelson impressed upon the foreign minister his desire to establish sincere and positive relations with the new Ortega government and the Nicaraguan people. Mentioning that he had met earlier in the day with Costa Rican astronaut/scientist Franklin Chang Diaz, the Senator cited this kind of bilateral cooperation as an example of the positive relations that the United States and a partner country have fostered. He explained Chang's involvement in the development of a new plasma rocket, a scientific advancement that will cut travel to Mars to a mere 29 days. His first time in Nicaragua, Senator Nelson recounted that during his six-day orbit around the Earth aboard the Columbia spaceship, he had observed the eruption of Nicaragua's Cerro Negro volcano, which had peaked his curiosity and his hopes to visit the country some day.

¶3. (C) Senator Nelson, who remarked that he has publicly and privately lauded Secretary Rice for her interest in improving U.S. relations with Latin America, explained that his tour of the region is intended to bolster our engagement with the region, including with leaders who do not see eye to eye with U.S. foreign policy. He related how in his two-hour meeting with Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez a few years ago, a very charismatic Chavez had been friendly, but not completely forthcoming. For example, in the meeting Chavez insisted that Venezuelan was not harboring FARC leaders. Nonetheless, two days later, a FARC leader had been found in Caracas, reportedly with the knowledge of the Venezuelan government. Chavez' lack of sincerity was problematic. The recent visit of Iranian President Ahmadinejad to Nicaragua was also of concern, specifically Ahmadinejad's exploitation of Nicaragua

to lash out against the United States.

¶4. (C) Wincing, Santos appeared to absorb the Senator's messages and reassured the Senator that Ortega seeks positive relations with the U.S. government. He added that his government's engagement with the U.S. Embassy, State Department officials like Assistant Secretary Shannon, and with the NSC has been very cordial and productive thus far. The Foreign Minister listed education, including eradicating illiteracy, health, and infrastructure as especially challenging areas where Nicaragua desires partnership with other countries, including the United States and the EU -- estimating that 70%-80% of Nicaraguans are functionally illiterate.

¶5. (C) Santos, who admitted that he is ashamed that Nicaragua relies so heavily on foreign assistance, asserted that Nicaragua must eventually wean itself off its dependency on foreign aid. However, as long as the "asymmetries" between Nicaragua and the United States continue, Nicaragua will rely on assistance, and Nicaraguans will continue to seek better futures in the United States. Walls will not stem the flow of immigrants; reducing disparities will, argued Santos.

¶6. (C) Responding to the Senator's query on the effect of CAFTA on Nicaragua thus far, Santos said that overall CAFTA has benefited his country, including a 30% increase in Nicaraguan exports to the United States since CAFTA's implementation in April 2006. The biggest challenge, however, lies with reducing the asymmetries between the two countries, specifically helping Nicaragua compete against a highly developed trade partner. (Comment: The asymmetry argument is one of President Ortega's favorites and may be influenced by President Chavez, who for years has used this concept to criticize the United States and justify his opposition to the constraints of the IMF and other international financial institutions.)

¶7. (SBU) Santos acknowledged that in addition to foreign assistance, the Ortega government will require the support of all Nicaraguans and all political parties to succeed in its struggle against poverty. He likened Nicaragua to an ox cart that is presently being stressed by four teams of oxen, each pulling in a different direction. Nicaragua urgently needs a common purpose and support by all Nicaraguans to achieve this purpose, ventured Santos.

¶8. (U) Participants:

Nicaragua:  
Samuel Santos  
Mrs. Anelli Santos  
Jose Alfredo Acevedo, Protocol Chief

U.S.:  
Senator Nelson  
Mrs. Grace Nelson  
Ambassador Paul Trivelli  
DCM Peter Brennan  
Ms. Carolina Tess  
Ms. Sherry Davich  
Captain Gene Moran  
Polcouns/notetaker Victoria Alvarado  
Control Officer Irene Marr

¶9. (U) This cable was cleared by Codel Nelson.  
TRIVELLI